

 SEMQ REVIEW

Managing the Whole Student Life Cycle: A Handbook for Higher Ed

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Reviewed by Tara Hisert Winter

Paul Marthers' book *Managing the Whole Student Life Cycle: A Handbook for Higher Ed* is a helpful handbook for higher education professionals who support various stages of the student life cycle. While its target audience is administrators and "doers," if you will, in higher ed, I would argue that it is also a book that would benefit leaders at the very top of the organization—those who may be developing programs in everything from enrollment management to student development to financial aid and who want to understand how every piece of the puzzle fits together to create something greater than any one piece can accomplish alone. Marthers draws not only on his decades of experience serving at both public and private institutions, but also provides practical examples and best practices for a range of scenarios. This "handbook" is timely in that, as Marthers points out, the college-going rate is declining, and the ROI on higher education is being questioned now more than ever. Reframing how campuses serve students, and understanding just who the students of today are, is of utmost importance. This book is an attempt to help higher education reflect and reframe their procedures to do that, no matter which stage of the process they are in.

As higher education continues to redefine its purpose, and students and families continue to question its value, Marthers calls upon his invaluable experiences at a number of varied institutions and systems of higher education as well as the experiences of many other in-

stitutions to provide a handbook of best practices to guide readers. The term handbook is apropos, as once reviewed, the chapters are set up in a way to allow the reader to refer back to whichever of the book's eleven areas may be most relevant at the time to their institution. Importantly, prior to diving into the subject matter areas that comprise student success, the book discusses how to structure units and divisions on campuses in order to facilitate cross-campus collaboration. What is helpful in the presentation of this discussion is that exemplars are provided for a number of campuses with multiple models. For example, an institution may feel it has a great onboarding, orientation, and first-year processes (chapter 2) but has not really yet established equity in student success programs (chapter 4). As within all chapters, readers will find a series of guiding questions to help frame the discussions at their own campus.

Throughout the handbook, readers will find that the tone with which the content is delivered is informative and inquisitive, not confrontational. As mentioned previously, each section has guiding questions to help spark a conversation when discussing the topic on campus. For example, there has been much debate regarding standardized testing, and that continues. Marthers presents the case factually and offers questions on page 248 such as, "Where are the strongest arguments for and against coming from, and what are the cited reasons?" and "How will alumni react to a change in testing pol-

icy?” and “Are there particular student populations or academic departments that will be advantaged or disadvantaged by a change in policy?” He is very measured in asking questions that invite multiple perspectives, regardless of the issue at hand. Given this approach, the handbook provides a resource for administrators to work with their colleagues to collectively tackle an issue, perhaps with a different perspective.

Marthers’ references are thorough, varied, and deep. It is clear that his foundational thinking—going back to John Dewey’s *Democracy in Education* in 1916, which is a fundamental thought piece for education—is present in his writing. Also clear is the presence and necessity of grit in chapter eight, where he presents a great deal of his research and also draws on Angela Duckworth’s research. This handbook was released in 2022 and includes early research on the pandemic’s impact on higher education.

As many campuses are struggling with enrollment, retention, and graduation, and as we are seeing demographics change in ways that we are underprepared but eager to assist, this handbook is a timely resource, and I would recommend it to higher education professionals in all areas—provosts, enrollment managers, student development, and presidents, among others. I would further argue, though Marthers did not touch on this,

that development officers would benefit from this work as well. While they do not directly have a role in the student life cycle while on campus, they should play a role in the communications portion, as graduation ties back into alumni participation, and that is a part of the student life cycle.

The content in *Managing the Whole Student Life Cycle* is presented in an easy-to-read format and in a tone that is inquisitive, factual, and amicable. It is presented in a somewhat sequential nature in that it asks the reader to first look at the structure of the life cycle and how it is established on their campus, and follows with ten additional chapters beginning with onboarding, through the role of the faculty, and closing with lessons on moving forward. I would like to think that the title of the book was intentional in that the author chose “whole” instead of “entire” to imply that there are many pieces of the cycle that make it complete and that if it is done well, that completeness will lead to greater student success. On a personal note, I had the opportunity to work with Marthers during his time at SUNY as a member of the chief enrollment officers’ group and found that this book is representative of his professional style: welcoming, helpful, and informative. I look forward to his continued contributions to the field and highly recommend this handbook.

About the Author



Tara Hisert Winter

Tara Hisert Winter has been a higher education professional for 25 years and has served in a variety of leadership roles. The majority of her experience is in enrollment management, with her most recent efforts focused on strategic planning and institutional effectiveness. Winter believes that a combination of servant leadership and data-informed decision-making

is fundamental to successful change management in higher education.

Winter holds an Ed.D. in executive leadership from St John Fisher, an M.S. in communications from Ithaca College, and an M.S. in education from the College of St. Rose.

Throughout her career, she has held positions where she has influenced the development and implementation of policies and practices to both enroll and retain students and to impact the overall strategic direction of the institution. She

has presented at several conferences on the value of data-informed decision-making and the importance of collaboration.

Winter also enjoys working directly with students and has taught coursework in strategic planning, research, and English and has also mentored doctoral candidates. She is community-minded and has served on local advisory boards focused on the arts and economic development and is a volunteer for the YMCA and local youth sports.